

Analysis of social determinants of health and health inequities
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Abstracts of key-note lectures

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Economic analysis of the Social Determinants of Health

There is growing interest in the use of economic arguments for investing in health, an approach that was perhaps most prominently promoted by the 2001 report of the Commission on Macroeconomics and Health. The subsequent Commission on Social Determinants of Health (CSDH) has recently made a strong case for the importance of economic and social factors for health and health equity. The CSDH explicitly took a social justice perspective and has preferred to leave aside major economic consideration around its recommended interventions. This raises the question what, if any, is the economic argument for investing in the social determinants of health? In this lecture we start to approach this question by clarifying what the economic argument should consist of from a conceptual level. What are the relevant "costs" and "benefits" of social determinants interventions? We then apply the conceptual discussion to specific policy areas, most notably early child development. We review existing evidence and highlight the scarcity of the existing economic evidence base on the "value for money" of SDH interventions. We also touch upon the issue of inequalities and how distributional consequences may be taken into account in economic evaluations - another area that offers much scope for further research